

St. Faustina and the Message of Divine Mercy

di Deepak Jose, O.Carm

Maria Faustyna Kowalska, also known as Saint Maria Faustyna Kowalska of the Blessed Sacrament and primarily known as Faustina, was a Polish Roman Catholic nun. Her visions of Jesus Christ inspired Roman Catholic devotion to the Divine Mercy. Kowalska had visions and dialogues with Jesus throughout her life. She recorded these in her diary which was published as *The Diary of Saint Maria Faustina Kowalska: Divine Mercy in My Soul*.¹ The Divine Mercy message is based on this 600-page diary in obedience to her spiritual director. Jesus called her to be “the secretary of Divine Mercy,” to make His immense mercy known to souls and to persuade them to trust in the bottomless depths of His Mercy.² In this work, I will focus on the Divine Mercy message revealed to St. Faustina and will attempt to bring out the standing value of such revelations theologically. I will also attempt to explore the lessons from the Divine Mercy message for us and the relevance of her message today. In what follows, I hope to exemplify that the Divine Mercy message of St. Faustina provides a great consolation for all of us, especially a great hope for those who have been crushed by the weight of sin and are tempted to give up in despair.

1. Early Life of St. Faustina

On August 25, 1905, Saint Maria Faustina Kowalska of the Blessed Sacrament was born as Helena Kowalska in Glogowiec, Poland, northwest of Łódź. Stanislaw Kowalski and Marianna Kowalska, Faustina’s parents, had ten children, and she was the third. Her father, Stanislaw, was a poor peasant and a carpenter and her family was devout.³ When Faustina was seven years old, she felt it necessary to enter the convent life. When she eventually informed her parents of her wish, they categorically refused. Helena struggled to suppress this spiritual urge within her as a result of this situation. Her piety, love of prayer, industriousness, and obedience, as well as her remarkable sensitivity to human misery, marked her from childhood. She had only been in school for three years. She left home at the age of fourteen to support her parents and earn her living as a servant in the adjacent cities of Aleksandrow and Lodz.⁴

2. Faustina in the Convent

Faustina’s first vision of Jesus took place in 1924. Faustina saw a suffering Jesus while dancing with her sister, Natalia, and she proceeded to a Cathedral. Jesus told Faustina to depart immediately for Warsaw and enter a convent. Faustina immediately packed her belongings and left the next day. When she first arrived in Warsaw, she went to Mass at Saint James church, the first church she saw. Faustina visited several convents while in Warsaw but was always turned down. She was assessed on her outward appearances and was sometimes rejected because of her poverty. Finally, Mother Superior of the

¹ Cf. Catholic Online, “St. Faustina Kowalska - Saints & Angels.”

https://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?saint_id=510.

² Cf. Faustina, *Diary of Saint Maria Faustina Kowalska: Divine Mercy in My Soul*. (Misericordia Publications, 2012), XVIII.

³ Cf. Online, “St. Faustina Kowalska - Saints & Angels.”

⁴ Cf. Faustina, *Diary of Saint Maria Faustina Kowalska*, XV.



Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy, agreed to admit Faustina if she could afford her own religious habit. Faustina began earning and making deposits to the convent while working as a housekeeper. Helena eventually entered the convent of the congregation of sisters of Our Lady of Mercy in Warsaw on August 1, 1925. She received her habit and the religious name of Sister Maria Faustina of the Blessed Sacrament on April 30, 1926. She professed her first religious vows as a nun in 1928. She took her final vows in Lagiewniki on May 1, 1933 and became a permanent member of Our Lady of Mercy.⁵ She was mainly entrusted with undertaking the roles of cook, gardener, and doorkeeper in her religious houses. She zealously carried out her responsibilities, obeyed all religious rules, recollected and remained silent, all the while remaining natural, happy, full of kindness, and unselfish love for her neighbors.⁶ She died on October 5, 1938. On April 30, 2000, St. John Paul II canonized Faustina as a saint.

3. St. Faustina and Divine Mercy Message

The Diary of St. Faustina conveys the message of God's merciful love as the very heart of the Gospel. Of course, it was not a new teaching; instead, it was a new expression with a clear focus on the heart of the Catholic Faith: God's loving mercy and compassion.⁷ She writes in her Diary: "Tell the world about my mercy and My love...I am Love and Mercy itself. When a soul approaches Me with trust, I fill it with such an abundance of graces."⁸ Jesus tells her to disperse His mercy and love, and when souls approach Him with trust they will receive the graces in abundance. Again, Jesus told her: "Let no soul fear to draw near to Me, even though its sins be as scarlet."⁹ Jesus told her that His mercy is more significant than our sins and the sins of the entire world. He descended from heaven to earth to save us; He permitted Himself to be nailed to the Cross for us; He allowed his Sacred heart to be pierced with a lance for us, thereby widening the stream of mercy for us. Come then, trusting in the mercies of this fountain. It is a consoling message that anybody can approach Jesus no matter how great our sins are. He never rejects a contrite heart.¹⁰ Through these words, Jesus expressed His great love for humanity and the reason for His suffering. Again, Jesus revealed to her: "The graces of My mercy are drawn by means of one vessel only, and that is- trust. The more a soul trusts, the more it will receive."¹¹ Here, Jesus emphasized the significance of trust that we must have as a means to obtain His graces.

Faustina asserted that Jesus stated that God is not only merciful to sinners but He is even more merciful to sinners than to the just. She wrote in her diary: "All grace flows from mercy ... Let no one doubt concerning the goodness of God; even if a person's sins were as dark as night, God's mercy is stronger than our misery."¹² Jesus gave her this message: "Let the greatest sinners place their trust in My mercy. They have the right before others to trust in the abyss of My mercy... Souls that make an appeal to My mercy delight Me. To such souls, I grant even more graces than they ask. I cannot punish even the greatest sinner if he makes an appeal to my compassion."¹³ Obviously, Christ's message to Faustina was one of extravagant love as He mentioned that He pours forth a vast ocean of graces on repentant souls who approach Him with trust, pouring forth even more than they ask for. He has a

⁵ Cf. Online, "St. Faustina Kowalska - Saints & Angels."

⁶ Cf. Faustina, *Diary of Saint Maria Faustina Kowalska*, XVI.

⁷ Cf. "The Message of Mercy in the Diary of St. Faustina," *The Divine Mercy*, July 7, 2006, <https://www.thedivinemercy.org/articles/message-mercy-diary-st-faustina>.

⁸ Faustina, *Diary of Saint Maria Faustina Kowalska*, no. 1074.

⁹ *Ibid.*, no. 699.

¹⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, no. 1485.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, no. 1578.

¹² *Ibid.*, no. 1507.

¹³ Faustina, *Diary of Saint Maria Faustina Kowalska*, no. 1146.



unique compassion for the most terrible sinners because they are the ones who need His mercy the most.¹⁴

3.1. Mission of St. Faustina

Sister Mary Faustina's mission comprises three tasks: The first is to remind the world of the reality of our faith which is God's merciful love for all people as provided in Holy Scripture. The second task is to Practice new forms of devotion to the Divine Mercy presented by Lord Jesus, such as the veneration of the Divine Mercy image with the inscription: Jesus, I Trust in You, the Divine Mercy feast celebration on the first Sunday after Easter, chaplet to the Divine Mercy, and prayer at the Hour of Mercy that is at 3 p.m. In surrendering one's life to God and exercising active love of one's neighbor, the Lord Jesus placed significant promises to the aforementioned forms of devotion. The third responsibility of Faustina's mission is to form the Divine Mercy apostolic movement which is charged with spreading and entreating God's mercy for the world while striving for Christian perfection following Faustina's teachings. The principles in question demand the faithful to have a childlike trust in God, which manifests itself in doing God's will and showing mercy to one's neighbors.¹⁵

3.2. The Image of the Divine Mercy

Our Lord appeared to Faustina in a vision in 1931. She saw Jesus wearing a white garment and raising His right hand in blessing. His left hand was touching His garment at His heart when two huge rays emerged from the heart, one red and the other pale. She was filled with awe but also with immense joy as she stared earnestly at the Lord in silence. Jesus said to her:

Paint an image according to the pattern you see, with the signature: Jesus, I trust in You. I desire that this image be venerated, first in your chapel and [then] throughout the world. I promise that the soul that will venerate this image will not perish. I also promise victory over [its] enemies already here on earth, especially at the hour of death. I Myself will defend it as My own glory.¹⁶

People are given a vessel with which to continue coming to the fountain of mercy for graces. That vessel is this image which bears the inscription: Jesus, I trust in You.¹⁷ Faustina asked Jesus about the significance of the rays in the image at the spiritual director's suggestion. Jesus replied to her: "The two rays denote Blood and Water. The pale ray stands for the Water, which makes souls righteous. The red ray stands for the Blood, which is the life of souls. These two rays issued forth from the depths of My tender mercy when My agonized Heart was opened by a lance on the Cross. These rays shield souls from the wrath of My Father."¹⁸ Jesus assured her that He would bestow many graces on souls with this image.¹⁹ We read the words of Jesus in her Diary that, "My Heart overflows with great mercy for souls, and especially for poor sinners. If only they could understand that I am the best of Fathers to them and that it is for them that the Blood and Water flowed from My Heart as from a fount overflowing with mercy. For them, I dwell in the tabernacle as King of Mercy."²⁰ These words imply that the Image represents Divine Mercy's graces, offered to

¹⁴ Cf. "The Message of Mercy in the Diary of St. Faustina."

¹⁵ Cf. "Mary Faustina Kowalska."

https://www.vatican.va/news_services/liturgy/saints/ns_lit_doc_20000430_faustina_en.html

¹⁶ Faustina, *Diary of Saint Maria Faustina Kowalska*, nos. 47-48.

¹⁷ Cf. Faustina, *Diary of Saint Maria Faustina Kowalska*, no. 327.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, no. 299.

¹⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, no. 742.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, no. 367.



the entire world through Baptism and the Eucharist.²¹ This reminds us of the magnificent Sacrament of Mercy, the Eucharist, in which the living Lord, who suffered, died on the Cross, and whose heart was pierced with a lance, pours forth His mercy on all humanity and forgives those who draw near and trust Him.²²

3.3. Divine Mercy Sunday and Extra-Ordinary graces

Our Lord called for a particular feast day to be observed on the Sunday after Easter in revelations to St. Maria Faustina in the 1930s. That feast is now known as Divine Mercy Sunday, established by St. John Paul II on April 30, 2000, at the canonization of St. Faustina. In His first revelation to St. Faustina, Jesus specified His will about this feast.²³ Her diary entry 699 has the most thorough revelation:

My daughter, tell the whole world about My inconceivable mercy. I desire that the Feast of Mercy be a refuge and shelter for all souls, and especially for poor sinners. On that day the very depths of My tender mercy are open. I pour out a whole ocean of graces upon those souls who approach the Fount of My mercy. The soul that will go to Confession and receive Holy Communion shall obtain complete forgiveness of sins and punishment. On that day are opened all the divine floodgates through which graces flow. Let no soul fear to draw near to Me, even though its sins be as scarlet... The Feast of Mercy emerged from My very depths of tenderness. It is My desire that it be solemnly celebrated on the first Sunday after Easter. Mankind will not have peace until it turns to the Fount of My mercy.²⁴

Faustina records the special graces on this feast day in her Diary that on the Feast of Divine Mercy, Jesus desires to grant a complete pardon to all who will go to Confession and receive Holy Communion.²⁵ Again, in Faustina's diary, we read that whoever comes to the Fount of Life on this day will be given total remission of sins and punishment.²⁶ The only condition for receiving these graces is that we receive the Eucharist on the Feast of Divine Mercy Sunday by making a good confession beforehand and remaining in a state of grace, and trusting in His Divine Mercy. On Divine Mercy Sunday, worthy reception of the Eucharist is sufficient to gain the great gifts promised by Jesus. Our Lord is highlighting the importance of Confession and Holy Communion as miracles of God's mercy.²⁷ In addition, our Lord tells St. Faustina that we are to make acts of mercy: "Yes, the first Sunday after Easter is the Feast of Mercy, but there must also be acts of mercy."²⁸

3.4. St. Faustina and Fr. Sopocko

In 1933, Faustina was assigned to work as a gardener in Vilnius, where she was also responsible for raising vegetables. She spent roughly three years in Vilnius, from March 1936 to March 1937. There she met priest Michael Sopocko, the nuns' new confessor, shortly after arriving in Vilnius. Fr. Sopocko grew increasingly captivated by her messages as they flowed from her pen week after week. However, he was still skeptical about the authenticity of her claims. After all, Fr. Sopocko was a well-educated theologian, and some of Faustina's writings struck him as so unusual that he questioned whether they were orthodox. One of our Lord's revelations to Faustina astonished Fr. Sopocko more than the

²¹ Cf. "What Is Divine Mercy? The Image," The Divine Mercy, December 12, 2018, <https://www.thedivinemercy.org/message/devotions/image>.

²² Cf. "What Is Divine Mercy? Forms of Devotion," The Divine Mercy, December 12, 2018, <https://www.thedivinemercy.org/message/devotions>.

²³ Cf. "What Is Divine Mercy Sunday?" The Divine Mercy, December 12, 2018, <https://www.thedivinemercy.org/celebrate/greatgrace/dms>.

²⁴ Faustina, *Diary of Saint Maria Faustina Kowalska*, no. 699.

²⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, no. 1109.

²⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, no. 300.

²⁷ Cf. "Extraordinary Graces," The Divine Mercy, December 12, 2018, <https://www.thedivinemercy.org/celebrate/greatgrace/graces>.

²⁸ Faustina, *Diary of Saint Maria Faustina Kowalska*, no. 742.



rest. As a result, he used it as the ultimate confirmation on the veracity of all her revelations. The argument that “mercy is God’s greatest attribute” was truly tested. Jesus had stated this to Faustina many times before, but this was the first time He said it in a message explicitly addressed to Fr. Sopocko, which made him pay careful attention!²⁹ Jesus revealed to her:

I desire that the first Sunday after Easter be the Feast of Mercy. Ask of my faithful servant [Fr. Sopocko] that, on this day, he tells the whole world of My great mercy; that whoever approaches the Fount of Life on this day will be granted complete remission of sins and punishment. Mankind will not have peace until it turns with trust to My mercy... My Heart rejoices in this title of Mercy. Proclaim that mercy is the greatest attribute of God. All the works of My hands are crowned with mercy.³⁰

Fr. Sopocko began his research to confirm that this is the greatest of God’s attributes in the works of the Fathers of the Church. He was delighted to discover similar claims in St. Fulgentius, St. Idelphonse, and even more so in St. Augustine and St. Thomas and, who spoke extensively on Divine Mercy in commenting on the Psalms calling it the greatest of God’s great attributes. Fr. Sopocko had no questions about Sister Faustina’s divine revelations after that.³¹

4. Theological Reflection on Mercy as the Greatest Attribute of God

We read in Faustina’s diary, “My Heart rejoices in this title of Mercy. Proclaim that mercy is the greatest attribute of God. All the works of My hands are crowned with mercy.”³² The revealed knowledge that mercy is the purpose for every divine action in the world might be regarded as Divine Mercy’s preeminence among God’s attributes. Furthermore, the effects of God’s merciful love’s operation are to his creatures’ greatest benefit. This concept is firmly rooted in Holy Scripture. In the Bible, the Lord is described as a God of mercy and compassion. “Merciful and gracious is the Lord, slow to anger, abounding in kindness.”³³ Again, we read that, “The Lord, the Lord, a merciful and gracious God, slow to anger and rich in kindness and fidelity.”³⁴ In the book of Prophet Joel, we read, “Rend your hearts, not your garments, and return to the Lord, your God. For gracious and merciful is he, slow to anger, rich in kindness, and relenting in punishment.”³⁵ The magisterium confirmed this mercy as the greatest attribute of God many years later in St. John Paul II’s great encyclical on Divine Mercy, *Dives in Misericordia*, when he wrote: “mercy is the greatest of the attributes and perfections of God, and the Bible, Tradition and the whole faith life of the People of God provide particular proofs of this.”³⁶ The message of Mercy is at the heart of the Gospel message; Mercy is God’s very name, the Face that He showed in the Old Covenant and in Jesus Christ through the incarnation and redemptive Love.³⁷

Pope Francis, in his Bull *Misericordiae Vultus* establishing the Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy, summed up the relevance of the theology of God’s merciful love to the whole faith and life of the Catholic Church better than anyone else. According to Pope Francis, we must continually reflect on the wonder of mercy. It is a source of peace, joy, and serenity and it is essential to our salvation. Mercy unveils the mystery of the Most Holy

²⁹ Cf. “The Message of Mercy in the Diary of St. Faustina.”

³⁰ Faustina, *Diary of Saint Maria Faustina Kowalska*, nos. 299-301.

³¹ Cf. “The Message of Mercy in the Diary of St. Faustina.”

³² Faustina, *Diary of Saint Maria Faustina Kowalska*, nos. 300-301.

³³ Ps 103:8 *The New American Bible* (New York: Catholic Book Pub. Corp., 1992).

³⁴ Ex 34:6 *ibid.*

³⁵ Joel 2:13 *ibid.*

³⁶ John Paul II, “Encyclical *Dives in Misericordia* (30 November 1980),” no. 13.

https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_30111980_dives-in-misericordia.html.

³⁷ Cf. Benedict XVI, “Regina Cæli, Second Sunday of Easter”, 30 March 2008.

https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/angelus/2008/documents/hf_ben-xvi_reg_20080330.html.



Trinity in a single word. Mercy is God's ultimate and supreme act of coming to meet us. Mercy is a fundamental law that exists in the hearts of everyone who gaze truly into the eyes of their neighbors on the path of life. Mercy is the link that binds God and man, giving us hope that we will be loved forever despite our sins.³⁸

5. Trust and its Theological Significance

Saint Faustina had a firm and realistic knowledge of the virtue of trust. She did not confuse it with a pious feeling of faith, and she did not think this virtue could be acquired without God's grace. She writes about the intensity of her trust in her diary: "Jesus, do not leave me alone in suffering. You know, Lord, how weak I am. I am an abyss of wretchedness. I am nothingness itself...I am an infant, Lord, so I cannot get along by myself. However, beyond all abandonment I trust, and in spite of my own feeling I trust, and I am being completely transformed into trust, often in spite of what I feel."³⁹ The message to trust in the Lord is based on the Bible as we read in Ps 125; Rom 4:5; 1 Pet 2:23, and so on.⁴⁰ According to Catechism 397, the mystery of sin is founded in a lack of trust in God's compassion and mercy: "Man, tempted by the devil, let his trust in his Creator die in his heart and, abusing his freedom, disobeyed God's command. This is what man's first sin consisted of. All subsequent sins would be disobedience toward God and a lack of trust in his goodness."⁴¹

6 Lessons From the Divine Mercy Message

The Divine Mercy message is clear. It is the fact that God loves us all. He also wants us to understand that His mercy exceeds our sins so that we might come to Him in trust, receive His mercy, and pass it on to others. As a result, everyone will come to share His joy. The message of Divine Mercy can be summarized in three points. 1- Ask for His Mercy- God desires that we approach Him in prayer regularly, repenting of our sins and pleading with Him to pour out His mercy on us and the entire world. 2- Trust in Jesus completely. God wants us to understand that we can only accept all of God's merciful graces if we trust Him. The more we trust Him with our hearts and lives, the more we will receive. 3- Be merciful. God desires that we accept His mercy and allow it to flow through us toward others. God wants us to love and forgive others as He loves and forgives us.⁴² The message of Divine Mercy and commitment were a new appeal to her, as well as to everyone else, to be merciful to one another.⁴³ Jesus declared to her: "My daughter, look into My Merciful Heart and reflect its compassion in your own heart, and in your deeds, so that you, who proclaim My mercy to the world may yourself be aflame with it."⁴⁴ The Divine Mercy message is a reminder that every human being is precious in the sight of God, and we need to consider everyone as precious and show mercy towards others.

³⁸ Francis, "Misericordiae Vultus - Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy ", 11 April 2015, no-2. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_letters/documents/papa-francesco_bolla_20150411_misericordiae-vultus.html.

³⁹ Faustina, *Diary of Saint Maria Faustina Kowalska*, no. 1489.

⁴⁰ Cf. "Saint Faustina the Theologian," *The Divine Mercy*, October 12, 2017, <https://www.thedivinemercy.org/articles/saint-faustina-theologian>.

⁴¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church: Revised in Accordance with the Official Latin Text Promulgated by Pope John Paul II*. (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2000), no. 397. <https://archive.org/details/catechismofcatho2000cath>.

⁴² Cf. "The Divine Mercy Message," *The Divine Mercy*, 12 December 2018, <https://www.thedivinemercy.org/message>.

⁴³ Cf. "The Message of Mercy in the Diary of St. Faustina."

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, no. 1688.



7 Relevance Today

Sister Mary Faustina, a Divine Mercy apostle, is now considered one of the Church's most famous and well-known saints. Through Faustina, the Lord Jesus communicates the pattern of Christian perfection based on trust in God and mercy toward one's neighbors, as well as the profound message of God's mercy to the world.⁴⁵ She brought us a sense of the magnitude of Divine Mercy, helped us to live it, and bear witness to it amid our neighbors. Her messages spread hope throughout the world, helping people to practice neighborly love and prompting sinners to conversion. In his homily during the canonization of Faustina, John Paul II said that this encouraging message of Divine Mercy is aimed mainly at people who are tempted to submit to despair as a result of the weight of their sins. The gentle face of Jesus is presented to them; the rays from his heart reach and light upon them, pointing them in the right direction, and filling them with hope.⁴⁶ Quoting the message of Faustina, John Paul II says:

'Humanity will not find peace until it turns trustfully to Divine Mercy.' (Diary, p. 132) ...This message has become linked forever to the 20th century, the last of the second millennium and the bridge to the third. It is not a new message but can be considered a gift of special enlightenment that helps us to relive the Gospel of Easter more intensely, to offer it as a ray of light to the men and women of our time.⁴⁷

Conclusion

Jesus asked Faustina to be an apostle and secretary of God's mercy, as well as an example of mercy for others and a method of articulating God's mercy plan for the world. Several times in His revelations to St. Faustina, Our Lord stressed the truth of his merciful love. A few of them are: I am love and mercy; Let no soul be afraid to approach Me, even if its sins are as scarlet; My mercy is greater than the sins of the entire world; Come with trust to draw graces from this fountain; the graces of My mercy can only be drawn with one vessel that is trust; the more trust a soul has, the more graces it will receive.⁴⁸ In order for God's mercy to entirely sanctify and save the world, we must consent and participate with His grace, and as Jesus reveals, the virtue of trust is the foundation of that participation. We must honestly believe that God freely gives us his merciful love, and we must open the door of our hearts to him with confidence to sanctify us. Thus, St. Faustina's Divine Mercy message brings enormous comfort and hope to the world because it assures us that if we wish to be free of the burden of sin, Jesus is eager to receive and sanctify us.

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⁴⁵ Cf. "Mary Faustina Kowalska."

⁴⁶ Cf. John Paul II, "Canonization of Sr. Mary Faustina Kowalska", 30 April 2000, no. 7.
https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/2000/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_20000430_faustina.html.

⁴⁷ Ibid., no. 2.

⁴⁸ Cf. Faustina, *Diary of Saint Maria Faustina Kowalska*, nos. 1074, 699, 1578.



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